1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

put it, the '*Sagi* of the poor'; what the royal princesses do for the women of the nobility the *Sonya* does for the women of her own class: she advises them and arbitrates in their quarrels, taking, however, the more serious cases to the *Sagi*. The *Sonya* might almost be called a female officer of state. All large-scale women's work that is done in Bida by order of the king is organized and supervised by her—for example, the beating of the floors in the houses of the king and the royal nobility. The *Sonya* is, above all, entrusted with the supervision of the market. She is elected by the Bida women who are regular traders on the market, and her rank is confirmed by the *Etsu*. The respect and deference with which all Bida women greet their *Sonya* illustrates the importance of her position. Formerly she was a royal fief-holder on a small scale, holding land of her own; she was also allowed to levy a small due on all business transacted on the market. Of this levy the *Sonya* returned one-third to the *Sagi* or *Nimwoye* as a symbol of her submission to the highest authority of these royal princesses over the women of Bida. To-day, the *Sonya* is still supervising the market and the work of the women. She has kept her status and her official position as well: for she has been made an official of the Native Administration and granted a small salary.

In every Nupe village, finally, we find a titled 'head of the women', called *Sagi*, like the royal princess in Bida. She is usually a woman about or over 50. She is elected by the married women of the village and her appointment is confirmed by the chief. In larger villages there may be a *Shaba Sagi* as well, an appointed successor to the headship of the women. The title *Sagi* itself seems to be of comparatively recent origin and was probably, like many other village titles, copied from the Bida rank system. The original title which it replaced was *Lelu*. This title, though no longer used, was explained to me in most villages to be the exact equivalent of the modern title *Sagi*. Yet this is not quite true: with the change in the title a subtle change in the significance of the rank has taken place. As I have described elsewhere, the Nupe chiefs used to bestow the rank *Lelu* on the woman who was believed to be the most powerful witch in the village. Her secret knowledge could thus be made to benefit the interests of the community. Turned into an organ of village administration, this woman could be used, in the opinion of the people, to check and control the subversive activities of the other witches.[1] With regard to witchcraft, then, the Nupe have adopted the proverbial policy of making a (reformed) criminal chief of police, or rather an imaginary criminal controller of an imaginary crime. Their belief in the efficiency of this measure has not changed. Yet the curtailed power of the present-day village chief, who is no longer free to act upon the advice of his female 'controller of witchcraft'; the general fear in the country, born of the experiences in the witchcraft trial in 1932, even so much as to mention the word witch or witchcraft; and in certain places also the growing importance of other more prosaic business for the head of the women, have all contributed to suppress the magical aspect

[1] See *Africa*, 1935, 4.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

of the office of the village *Sagi* and to emphasize its harmless business side instead.

Thus we find that in many Nupe villages an efficient business-like head of the women has succeeded the *Lélu* or *Sagi* of the old type. In other places, again, the people would not admit the magic significance of the woman's rank. Yet the strength of the belief, concealed though it may be, was shown in a witchcraft case which I happened to witness in Gbajibo, a small village on the Niger above Jebba. Here the *Sagi*, the very business-like head of the local women, was yet behind the public outcry against an alleged witch. The women much more than the men were leading in this persecution; they had been the first to ostracize the victim; and when I questioned them about their motives, they all referred me to the *Sagi*. Her own motive appeared to be jealousy of the other woman, the alleged witch, in whom she saw a dangerous rival, possibly even for the position of a *Sagi*.

The office of the *Sagi*, modern or traditional, is invariably a much-coveted one. Her moral hold over the women, as our example has shown, is complete. It is equally strong in the less sinister spheres of communal life: like the *Sonya* in Bida, the village *Sagi* advises the women, organizes women's work, arbitrates between them, and receives small presents from every business transaction which they carry through.

MARRIAGE AND STATUS

The ranks and offices already discussed all belong to married women. But we have seen that they represent forms of status which the women acquire in their own right, on the grounds of descent, or personal ability, or both, independent of their status as wives of men who occupy this or that social position. We shall see later that the same principle applies also to the status won by wealth. In particular the status by descent of the Nupe women is affected but little by marriage, i.e. by the social status of their husbands; in so far as it is so affected, this change is in the direction of social advancement. Women of low birth who marry above their status into the aristocracy can claim the status of their husbands; and women who marry beneath their station do not lose their status but raise their husbands to their own social level. The men will be allowed to share most of the social and political privileges of the class into which they marry. Two cases were reported to me in which the men could even acquire *saraki* ranks after marrying a woman of the *saraki* nobility. But even if the men are not admitted fully into the titled class, their children would always acquire the status of their mother. Daughters may thus inherit the status of their fathers, and both sons and daughters that of their mothers; husbands may be adopted into the social sphere of their wives and parents-in-law. This social regulation may seem surprising in an otherwise strongly patrilineal society. But this one-sided interpretation of the change of status that goes with marriage is not an expression of matrilineal kinship tendencies, nor of 'feminist' leanings in Nupe society (though we shall find ample evidence of these, too); rather it expresses political

3: Forde E-4 (no date) 1955 FF52 Nupe FF52

633 648 between the central administration and the Fulani, counts Fulani cattle and collects *jangali* (cattle tax).[20]

634 The Districts of Ilorin Province with a mixed Nupe and Yoruba population sometimes had two District Heads. When Sharagi District was placed in Ilorin Emirate (*c.* 1913) the Nupe chief (*Ndakpoto*) was made District Head, though he is said to have had no control over the people as a whole. The Igbona Yoruba head (*Olupo*) is said to have been effective among the Yoruba. The District Heads of Lafiagi and Pategi are called *Rani*, that of Kupa *Makun*, of Kakanda *Agandu*, and of Shaku *Kpotuy*.[21]

Village Organization

621 Every Nupe village constitutes a separate political entity, each with its own head (*Žitsu*) who "owns" the village, controls its main resources and the lives of its inhabitants, and often assumes its name. In Jebba and Mokwa the position of head is filled by the promotion of one of the senior elders of the village. Elsewhere it is hereditary in one house (*emi*). In either case the appointment has to be confirmed by the *Etsu* Nupe. The interregnum before the appointment of the new head is filled by a high ranking elder, *ndeji*, "father of the town." Some villages have heads officially appointed by the administration who are distinct from the traditional heads, called *Etsu nyenkpa* ("money," i.e., tax, "chief") as opposed to *Žitsu*, "town chief." In some riverain villages, e.g., Funga, Nantu, Batachi, Edogi, and Badeggi, the village head is called *gago*, a title said to be used by Hausa speakers.[22]

627 The Basa-Nge of Igala Division are divided into 14 inland and riverain units under a village headman responsible to the *anuja* (?District Head). These headmen are chosen by the elders of each unit, but their appointment is subject to the approval of the *Ata* Gala, from whom many of them hold titles and beads of office.[23]

The village head is responsible for the appointment of the village elders from the ranks of the family heads, the control and apportionment of land, and the enforcement of fishing rights. He organizes and partly finances certain religious rites linked with chiefship, though he is not regarded as the religious head of the community. He arbitrates in disputes and has certain limited and informal judicial powers; he also organizes any concerted action of the community or large-scale work such as road-making. Formerly he had special prerogatives and still receives annual gifts in kind in some small villages.

623 The village head is assisted by a council of elders (*gusaži*, sing. *gusa*, the "old ones," or *ticiži*, the "titled ones") who act as mouthpieces, agents, and informants of the chief. They are the heads of families or groups of families who live together in one ward (*efu*). Their titles are conferred on them by the chief, some titles reflecting the occupation followed by the elder and his family. The position of an elder as head of a specific group is recognized by the community, as is the division of the affairs of the village between a number of elders.

624 In villages where the headship is hereditary, important priestly offices are not usually identified with political office, the office of village priest (*Žigi*) being kept in the junior branch of the house. *Žitsu* and *Žigi*, "town chief" and "town priest," often appear in genealogies as elder and younger brother in the classificatory sense. In those villages where the head is elected from the senior title-holders, religious ceremonies are performed by the elder who is entrusted with the rule of the village during an interregnum and whose office is hereditary, so that instead of there being a hereditary chief there is, as it were, a hereditary "king-maker."

[20] Notes on Bida Emirate, 1936.
[21] Biscoe, 1918; Notes on Kakanda District, 1934.
[22] Rochfort Rae, 1921; Notes on Kakanda District, 1934. The title *gago* is also found in the Kamberi areas north of the Nupe country. Mathews (1936) says that it is generally used by Hausa speakers to mean village head. In Bargery's Hausa dictionary the meaning is given as 'a pagan chief.'
[23] Hopkins, 1934.